

16th ANNUAL NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL

This year's festival once again surpassed itself in excellence of selections and presentation. There was a great variety and no publications. The whole spirit of the entire festival was happier and more co-operative.

As usual, after the sound of the bell by the town crier, Amos Kubik, the aged Czech from Princeton, Mass., the festival was ushered in, and the Indians opened the program. But this year the Indians presented an even gayer and a brighter display of dazzling feathers. Many more tribes than ever before were present. Besides the faithful Kiowas from Oklahoma, there were Tewas, Acomas, Zunis, Lagunas, Navajos and Onondagos. The last named was from New York and the others were from New Mexico. The variety of costume which each tribe wore, the tinkle of bells, the sparkle of mirror chips, the picturesqueness of the garbs of plummage of some and the bead work of others, the primitive drum beat and pulsation, their call and shout, was something to behold and be awed.

There were not as many square dance groups this year as there were in previous years. Those that there were, even tho they were not "big name" groups, were, however, representative groups for the most part. As a result there was more variety and more interest and one didn't have to exclaim with regret, "what, another square dance group?" The Barrington, Illinois, youngsters under the direction of Truman Chiles, were especially good. They were the most inspiring group present. The lime-light was also held by the Sherwood Club and Boots and Calico Club from Denver, Colorado, who appeared with some forty people on six shows. The ones that evoked amazement because of the stamina required to perform were the Ozark square dancers who jiggled through their squares like jumping jacks. The Camdenton, Mo. group was the better of the two presenting this type of dance. The caller of the second Ozark group wore his kids to a frazzle until even the audience lost amazement at the endurance but instead became concerned with the well being of the dancers who could no more hide their fatigue. There is a limit and the first group knew its limitations and as a result their presentations were wonderful.

St. Louis groups appeared several times. The danced couple-round dances on one day and square dances on a second day. A group from Bellville, Ill. and Kansas City, Mo., completed the cycle of Square dancers. All presented their parts ably and enjoyably. And the program was not overburdened with Square dancing there was a much greater appreciation toward the viewing of the groups and keener interest was displayed.

The Sing and Swing club from Carbondale, Ill., presented a most interesting scene as they danced singing party games and portrayed a Corn husking bee; a community event during "shucking" (husking) time when a boy who got a red ear of corn was permitted to kiss the girl of his choice. They presented quite a lively act.

On the various days of the festival various individuals or small groups presented a most unusual variety of ballads, Cowboy Songs, instruments, Fidlers, bone rattling, whistling tunes, bird imitations the imitation of dogs barking during a fox hunt. There were also various rare instruments and religious groups. Miners sang, customs were portrayed and the variety was unusually broad. The wonderful thing of the whole festival was the fact that they were interesting presentations. The Shaker girls from Enfield, N. H. were not only sweet appearing but their offering was unusual and unique.

Their hand motion during their singing was something rare. This unusual group also presented a dance, but Shakers dare not call it by that name. It was a circle with hands outstretched and waving rhythmically as they sang a song of receiving the spirit.

The Mormons from St. Louis, 75 of them of various ages, sizes, and sexes, re-enacted a scene from their wanderings to find the Land of Promise. They sang hymns and they danced quadrilles and portrayed what they thought Mormons would have done during a rest period along the hard and difficult road of their wanderings. Their singing was superb and the scene heart warming.

Of the two Negro Spiritual singing groups, without any deliberation, the Cotton Blossom Singers from Piney Woods, Miss., eight lovely and charming girls, presented a most outstanding bit of singing. They charmed everyone with their personality and performance.

A rare treat was the Austrian group who are now touring the United States. They appeared on every performance and gave a thrilling show with their songs, yodles, harp playing, and dancing. Their precise plating and gay manner captivated everyone present.

Members of the Minnesota Folk Dance Federation also presented German and Austrian dances. This group is not ethnic, but is composed of people from many backgrounds and their performance this year was of such fine quality and authentic flavor that even the visiting European Austrians were thrilled with the performance of the Synthetic Austrians who wore their short trousers of the Tyrol with deserving pride. It was wonderful to note the transformation and progress made since their participation two years ago when they were flavorless and barely had any reason for presence on a festival program unless it could be to represent beyond a fact that Americans of mixed breeds had taken over folk dances of other nations and made a mess of them for personal pleasures.

Another "Synthetic" group presenting a proud picture where the youngsters from the Oglebay Institute of Wheeling, W. Va. They did a series of Butch and Swiss dances. Shod with heavy Klompen (wooden shoes) they banged through interesting routines with the charm peculiar to the Dutch. After a change of costumes they also presented several singing circles cleverly interpreted.

Other "synthetics" were the French group from Chicago's International House who presented six charming dances from various regions in France. Their dances were light, skippy, breezy and gay, with an air that seemed most care free. The same group presented the following day three court dances from France, Russia, and England, respectively. The court dance portrayed regal elegance and the splendor of a period when men displayed a "well turned" ankle (?) wearing high stockings and short trousers while the women hid their "sinful" legs behind hoops and layers of fancy material. Even to the dances were slow the grace and elegance captured the audience.

Mrs. Ona Ivaska from Boston, Mass. was once again present with a fine group of young men and women who represented Lithuania with four charming dances; Ciganelis, Ruguciai, Ozelis and Malunas to the accompaniment of the Kankles played by Mrs. Ivaska and the Accordion by Vytautas Strolia who also played the unusual Lithuanian "ragelē" a cow horn.

The Harikuda Group of St. Louis gave Israeli dances on Wednesday night and Jewish dances on Thursday.

Mrs. Leah Millman was their director. The Israeli dances, never being of the exhibition type, went through a slight dressing up but toward the "dance moderne" direction which takes it out of the folkish realm into a stage category. However, the dancers did a grand job in performing. Thursday night's show stealer, however, was their Jewish wedding scene. It was "conglomerative" as it combined theatricism, Hassidic and just plain Jewish, not excluding the American Jewish type of dancing. Even tho it was not a "verbatim" traditional scene it was delightful scene deserving a great round of applause and compliments to Mrs. Millman. Nowadays Jewish groups seem to avoid doing Jewish dances which have so much unique charm, and all clamor for Palestinian — Israeli dances only, which is fine; but let them not forget that for the past hundreds of years they were Jews and have created a rich tradition, while the Israeli dance culture is so new and so unsettled that one doubts if any of the present Israeli dances have any permanency at all. They might prove to be just passing fad-dances. But time will tell.

An interesting number on the program was a strutting Cake Walk by a fine group of young negro boys and girls. One of the light or ten year-old strutted so well that even tho he was walking with his shoulders thrown far back, his knees were still practically reaching his nose.

A German group from Rhineland, Mo. presented the Wurst Jaeger's parade and dance — a portrayal of a pre-lenten carnival with masquerading and dancing. This group improved considerably over last year's performance and presented a merry scene. Other "celebrants" were the people from Prairie du Rocher in Ill. who presented a custom still kept alive among the French settlers of that community as they celebrate New Year's eve. They, too, on their third annual appearance, have gotten into the swing of things and lost some of the stage fright. It was a pleasure to watch people in their very late years, some over 90, dance and go through routines.

We often see groups who love to exhilarate and speed up their dances to an unnatural tempo but the English dancers of Ft. Madison slowed down their tempo to a very un-English slowness. It dropped from allegro to andante. The much of the British character was found wanting in the dances, the youngsters who had not been exposed to this type of dance (or any type of dance until only recently) did the best they could with exactness but under strain. They looked good on the stage and presented a wholesome picture. An advancement (almost remarkable) over last year was made by the Sherwood Club from Denver in their groups of English dances.

Yugoslavia was represented by three separate Croatian Groups — a very one sided representation to go under the caption of Yugoslavia since only Croatia was represented. As usual, Tambouritz music, when well played, is enchanting. The Croatian costumes are always eyecatchers and the dances with the vibrative rhythm and twinkling feet is one of the seven wonders even tho Serb-Croatian dancing lacks other points that are needed for exhibition material. The St. Louis dancer were on the ball, but the Milwaukee dancers under the direction of the Burazins, were tops. Frances Cernich, accompanying herself on the accordion, rendered captivatingly several Yugoslav folk songs.

John Madsen, noted dance leader from Toronto, Canada, brought a wonderful group with him from Toronto, who presented a series of Danish dances. Their interpretations of some of the numbers were out of this world.

Even the simple Gustaf Skol was captivating by employing one cute expression. Other simple dances went through an elaboration, but their dancing was the smoothest of all Scandinavian groups seen at the Folk Festival. Their Oxdansen was one of the most pleasurable riots ever presented. It was a classic. Skol to the Madsens and their group.

Chicago's Harold Thorsen and his Norwegians with the predominance of bright red in their costume, did a group of most interesting trio dances and several couple numbers. It was their first appearance at the Folk Festival and they certainly left a fine impression and made a grand debut of which they can well be proud.

The Uyeda sisters and their proteges, Chicagoans, were the only Orientals on this year's program. The adult number and the two tiny tots, as in all other performances, again charmed the audience with their presentations. The two seven year oldsters evoked mirth, admiration and a strong round of applause with their modern Japanese dance "If I Had a Raise."

Children stole the show in the Ukrainian section with two little ones putting on a flirtatious Ukrainian dance with the boy doing difficult floor steps and an even smaller girl keeping an amazingly perfect rhythm. There was an exciting Kozachok, the beloved Katarina, a Hopak and a girl's Hutsulian dance. The Chicago Russians accompanied the Cleveland Ukrainians with music, which was a nice gesture on the Russian part to come to their assistance inspite of the very overt knowledge of disharmony between the two blood-related groups.

The Russian group is wonderful and excellent and they have a fine bunch of youngsters in their midst. I have nothing but admiration for that group. However, their insistence on singing patriotic Russian songs with that strong communist flavor might eventually wreck the folk festival. It has no room on such festivals for two main and good reasons; 1) It is not a concert hall but a place where folk songs and dances and lore is presented; 2) the presence of the many DP's. These persons, while still under the occupied yoke, were forced to learn the very same songs by the invaders under threat of Siberian concentration slave labor camps and death. They saw dear ones slain or taken away from their midst; they left everything behind them to flee terror and suffer further untold hardships in DP's camps. And then to come to a folk festival in a new land and to have to listen to the same songs is anything but pleasant. If the Russian group desires to prove that is is not a communist affiliated group, why then sing persistently each time irritable pro-Soviet songs? Aside from that, the Russian dances (more properly, the dances of the nations occupied by the Russians) were excellent. They are breath-taking and leave everyone breathless, the dancers as well as the spectators. I don't believe we have anything like them anywhere else in the Union. They are outstanding and all credit must be given where credit is due. With their dancing they'll win friends.

Tho the dances of the Lithuanians are not as breath-taking as that of the Russians (Ukrainians-Moldavians), the Chicago Lithuanian group proves to be stiff competition to the Club Metros. The Lithuanians also boast the folkish, down-to-earth quality which no other group can honestly claim. Their dances, and especially their Malunas are bewitching.

The Czechs from Cleveland presented their overly long Beseda. The fact that rhythms and tempo change continually, was made easy upon the spectators to watch so long a routined single number. The puffed costumes of the women and, in general, the richness of the cos-